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ABSTRACT

To guide the development of teacher education programs at the University of Western Sydney Macarthur (Australia), a "Starting Teacher" questionnaire and the Graduate Career Council of Australia survey were administered to 48 early childhood and 168 primary teacher education students at their graduation ceremony in April 1993. These instruments focused on characteristics of the graduates, information about their workplaces, views about the relevance of their courses, and their feelings about themselves. Items in the questionnaire were based on key issues in the literature on induction and issues of particular concern in southwest Sydney. Respondents had been reasonably successful in finding employment in the region which employed large numbers of beginning teachers. According to the data analysis, formal induction programs were minimal; most felt confident and happy about making teaching a career; the vast majority believed that their preservice courses had prepared them well, but a significant number of primary graduates indicated that more emphasis could have been placed on what to teach (subject matter knowledge). In addition, reflective practice, a greater integration of knowledge, and an in-school semester are emphasized. (Author/LL)

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STARTING TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

In April 1993, at the graduation ceremony of the University of Western Sydney Macarthur, 46 early childhood and 168 primary teacher education graduates completed a Starting Teaching Survey. It focused on the characteristics of the graduates, information about their workplaces, views about the relevance of their courses, and feelings about themselves. Items in the questionnaire were based on key issues in the literature on induction and issues of particular concern in south west Sydney.

The respondents, who were predominantly female and from south west Sydney, had been reasonably successful in finding employment in the region which, unlike some regions, employed large numbers of beginning teachers. Formal induction programs were minimal but the graduates believed that teachers, pupils and the parents of the pupils had accepted them well. Most felt confident and happy about making teaching a career. The vast majority believed that their preservice courses had prepared them well, but a significant number of primary graduates indicated that more emphasis could have been placed on what to teach (subject matter knowledge). The findings will provide a benchmark for studying the impact of new courses that have been introduced. They place emphasis on reflective practice, a greater integration of knowledge, and an in-school semester.

INTRODUCTION

In most western countries teacher education is now regarded as a continuum from preservice course, through induction, to continuing inservice education (Fullan, 1990). The link between preservice teacher education and induction has been the focus of attention in NSW recently with the publication of *Competencies for Beginning Teachers* which was developed by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Teacher Education and the Quality of Teaching (1994). A few years ago the needs of beginning teachers were highlighted in a report to the Australian Education Council which proposed a special induction period of two years on half pay for beginning teachers (Ebbeck, 1990). The proposal has not been implemented, but it clearly points to concern about induction in Australia and the need for modern research on the process. In England, for example, a major emphasis is on partnership between universities and schools (Wilkin, 1990), with induction being identified by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (1989; 1991) as the weakest link in the process.

The findings of the major study of teacher induction in Australia by Tisher, Fyfield and Taylor (1979) have generally been corroborated in later studies by Carpenter and Byde (1986), Reed (1986) and McCahon and Carpenter (1987). For example, most beginning teachers feel they are satisfied with their appointments, are managing adequately, and are accepted by the school. They express concerns about minimal participation in curriculum development and their limited ability to evaluate their teaching, motivate pupils, control classes, and teach pupils with a wide range of abilities. Studies of relatively small numbers of beginning teachers, such as those by Fogarty and Lennon (1991) and Martinez (1992),

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have illustrated the personal adjustment and development that takes place as graduates begin to teach.

In a major study of recently recruited teachers by Batten, Griffin and Ainley (1991), the response rate to questionnaires was relatively poor, but the findings showed that primary teachers were more supportive of their preservice courses than secondary teachers. However, only 51% of primary respondents rated their preservice courses positively, and 21% gave them negative ratings. The study did highlight the many forms of assistance that are available to beginning teachers and their effectiveness.

The *Starting Teaching* study, which involved early childhood and primary teacher education graduates from the University of Western Sydney Macarthur in 1993, focused on the above and other issues.

COURSES

It is important to note that the courses which students in the study had just completed were the three-year Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood) and the three-year Diploma of Teaching (Primary). These courses had a preponderance of studies in the fields of education and curriculum, with scope for students to include some further study in these fields in part of the course which constituted general electives. Practice teaching was carefully planned and supervised in block sessions in the inter-semester periods.

The courses have now changed. Both the old and new courses are essentially teacher-preparation courses and not liberal arts or science courses with a component of teacher preparation. In the new courses, with an emphasis on producing reflective practitioners, practice teaching and field experience are distributed throughout, culminating in an in-school semester. As against discrete curriculum studies in particular subject areas, there is now greater emphasis on integration and correlation of content.

There was some disquiet among students starting teaching in 1993 that they were receiving diplomas for three years' work whereas students embarking on the new courses would receive degrees. Furthermore, the new courses were supposed to be an improvement on the old. It is difficult to estimate the effect that these perceptions might have had on the responses of graduates in the present study.

METHODOLOGY

A *Starting Teaching* questionnaire was administered to 48 early childhood and 168 primary teacher education students at their graduation ceremony in April 1993. (The same questionnaire had been administered in the previous year but to fewer people.) Students were also asked to complete the Graduate Career Council of Australia survey at the same time. This unfortunately placed a heavy demand on them but the course experience component of the GCCA survey provided a check on the findings of the *Starting Teaching* questionnaire.

The survey instrument was designed to obtain information that focused on students graduating from an institution in south west Sydney. It also contained general items that derived from key issues in the research literature on beginning teaching and induction. The four main sections were:

1. Biographical and Background Information
2. Information about your Workplace
3. Views about the Relevance of your Course
4. Feelings about Yourself

RESULTS

Student Characteristics

The majority of the graduates were female: 98% in early childhood and 85% in primary. Approximately two-thirds of them had entered their courses straight after school, with 84% of early childhood and 90% of primary graduates coming from south west Sydney.

A high percentage of the graduates (61% early childhood and 59% primary) by Australian norms had received AUSTUDY during some or all of their courses. About three-quarters of all the graduates also held jobs during their courses. Hours per week spent in employment during the teaching semester were: 0-5 hours: 14%; 6-10 hours: 22%; 11-15 hours: 20%; 16-20 hours: 11%; and more than 20 hours: 8%. Because almost all the respondents were full-time students, these are important findings. Clearly, some form of income is important.

Because UWS Macarthur has affirmative action programs for special entry to its courses, it is significant to note that approximately 18% of graduates had gained entry via the Regional Entry Test. This is a type of scholastic aptitude test. A further 4% had completed the primary course via the Aboriginal Rural Education Program (AREP). In this program the students came on to campus for a series of intensive residential schools each year and also continued studying in the intervening periods when they returned to work in their home locations. The three-year course was extended to 4.5 years or longer to accommodate the study pattern. These AREP students would have accounted for the majority of those mentioned above who were working more than 20 hours per week.

A striking difference was evident between early childhood and primary students in terms of the number from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). Only 2 of the 43 early childhood students were native speakers of a language other than English, whereas 44 of the 167 primary students were in this category. European languages accounted for 35 of the 44 NESB speakers.

Employment

At the time of the survey, which was 2.5 months into the school year in 1993, graduates had a variety of employment patterns as shown in Table 1.

Employment Category	*Early Childhood Graduates*		*Primary Graduates*	
No job at present	2	(4%)	23	(14%)
Part-time occasional job	5	(11%)	30	(18%)
Part-time regular job	5	(11%)	34	(20%)
Full-time job for time being	3	(7%)	10	(6%)
Full-time job on regular basis	31	(67%)	70	(42%)
Totals:	46	(100%)	167	(100%)

Table 1: Employment Pattern of Graduates

Early childhood graduates clearly had a better employment record than primary graduates. Furthermore, all of those who were employed were working in the field of teaching whereas 9% of primary graduates were not. It should be noted that the employment record of graduates from previous years was much better. When the targeted graduate scheme was introduced in the Department of School Education, UWS Macarthur graduates did exceptionally well in comparison to graduates from other universities in NSW. For whatever reasons, perhaps the recession being a major one, the situation had changed by 1993.

Overall, almost two-thirds of those with jobs were working in public institutions but, as would be expected, more primary graduates (83%) than early childhood (60%) were in public institutions. Eighty-four percent of the jobs obtained by primary graduates were in south west Sydney, whereas 67% of early childhood graduates were working in the region and 27% elsewhere in Sydney. Overall, approximately 12% of all graduates were working in other areas of Sydney and a further 6% in NSW outside Sydney. UWS Macarthur clearly caters for a local market.

Given the demand for beginning teachers in south west Sydney, it is not surprising that most graduates were in schools where there were from 1 to 4 other beginning teachers. In a few schools there were even larger numbers. Of those who responded to the question about team teaching, it would appear that two-thirds of graduates were responsible for their own classes while the other third were in team teaching situations.

Sixty percent of graduates were not given a formal induction program in their schools. Of those who were inducted through some deliberate program, fewer than half felt it was substantial and only a minority felt it was effective. If the general views about the efficacy of induction in the educational literature are correct, much needs to be done to improve induction programs for beginning teachers in south west Sydney.

Notwithstanding the findings about induction programs, it should be noted that approximately half the graduates were assigned a mentor or supervisor who was perceived to be effective in helping the beginning teacher.

Relevance of Courses

Consistent with the findings in several other studies of beginning teachers mentioned earlier in this paper, graduates felt that their course of initial teacher education at university prepared them well to be a beginning teacher. On a five point scale from "very poor" to "very good", 83% of early childhood graduates and 68% of primary graduates selected the two top scale points, while only 4% of both categories combined selected the bottom two categories.

Practice teaching was overwhelmingly seen as the course component that was most beneficial in preparing the respondents to be teachers. Curriculum studies were marginally ahead of education studies and topped the list of course components that needed strengthening.

A significant finding about course content is set out in Table 2. Graduates were asked about the balance in the course in terms of teaching them "how to teach" (knowledge of strategies) and "what to teach" (knowledge of subject matter). Primary graduates indicated that more emphasis was needed on subject matter knowledge. What place should subject matter have in teacher education is a vexed question overseas. In England, for example, there is great emphasis on what teachers need to know, and a widespread belief that the "how to teach" question can best be addressed by putting students in schools for practical experience. In the United States, Shulman's work on pedagogical content knowledge has demonstrated that the possession of subject matter knowledge *per se* does not necessarily produce a good teacher. Educators such as Cochran et al (1993) have extended Shulman's views by referring to pedagogical content knowing which incorporates views about constructivism in the way teachers transform knowledge in order to teach effectively. In Australia, Turney *et al* (1993) have recently gone beyond subject-matter knowledge and focused on the neglected knowledge needs of prospective and beginning teachers.

Desirable balance *in course*	*Early Childhood Graduates*		*Primary Graduates*	
More emphasis needed on "how to teach"	10	(24%)	31	(26%)
Balance is about right	20	(48%)	31	(26%)
More emphasis needed on "what to teach"	12	(28%)	56	(48%)
Totals:	42	(100%)	118	(100%)

Table 2: Graduates' Perceptions of Desirable Balance in Courses between Teaching Strategies and Subject Matter

At a time when the Minister for Education in NSW was stressing the need for teacher educators to have recent and relevant experience in schools, it was appropriate to ask graduates how knowledgeable teacher education staff were of the realities of school and classroom life. Table 3 indicates that almost 90% had a fair to very good knowledge.

Teacher Educators' Knowledge of the Realities of School and Classroom Life	*Early Childhood Graduates*		*Primary Graduates*	
Very good knowledge	12	(30%)	11	(9%)
Good knowledge	14	(35%)	53	(44%)
Fair knowledge	9	(23%)	42	(35%)
Poor knowledge	4	(10%)	12	10%)
Very poor knowledge	1	(2%)	2	(2%)
Totals:	40	(100%)	120	(100%)

Table 3: Graduates' Perceptions of how Knowledgeable Teacher Education Staff were of the Realities of School and Classroom Life

While it is clear that the majority of graduates felt that their lecturers had a fair to good knowledge of schools and classrooms, questions need to be asked about the perceived 12% who did not. Given the nature of the item in the questionnaire, there is no way of knowing whether they were curriculum studies lecturers or foundation studies lecturers. If it is assumed that they were foundation studies lecturers, the response pattern begs the question of whether they should have a better knowledge of schools and classrooms.

Students' Feelings about Themselves

As Table 4 below illustrates, the vast majority of respondents felt that they had been well accepted by the other teachers, the pupils they taught and the parents of the pupils.

Degree of Acceptance	Beginning Teachers' Perception of acceptance by		
	Other Teachers	Pupils Taught	Parents of Pupils
Very well	73 (46%)	107 (67%)	67 (43%)
Well	66 (42%)	47 (29%)	74 (48%)
Adequately	18 (11%)	5 (3%)	11 (7%)
Poorly	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Very poorly	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Totals	158 (100%)	160 (100%)	154 (100%)

Table 4: Graduates' Perceptions of Their Degree of Acceptance by Other Teachers, the Pupils They Teach, and the Parents of the Pupils

The majority of graduates were confident (59%) or very confident (9%) as teachers, and almost all others (30%) felt adequate. Likewise, the majority (88%) were happy or very happy to make teaching a career. Because the graduates had just completed a three-year course, it was relevant to find out how many planned to pursue further university studies at some time in the future. Most did, with 62% expressing a definite plan and a further 30% indicating a possible commitment.

An attempt was made to find out how many hours per week that graduates were devoting to teaching and preparation for teaching. The range of employment patterns yielded a wide range of responses. The majority of those with full-time jobs were working in excess of 60 hours per week. Programming, as it is known in NSW, was a key requirement in most schools and a major task to be completed. The amount of resource material in schools to meet teaching needs was good to very good in 63% of cases and adequate in 29% of cases.

Of those graduates who were working in classrooms that contained children who spoke English as a second language, 70% felt that they coped well in meeting the needs of the ESL children. Almost all the others indicated that they just coped. The percentages were not as high when it came to meeting the needs of children with special behavioural or learning needs. Only 52% coped well and almost all the others just coped. Likewise, the percentages drop even further when it came to coping with the assessment of pupils. Only 41% coped well, 51% coped adequately and 8% coped poorly.

Graduates were also asked to indicate how successful they had been with classroom discipline and in establishing effective discipline in the classroom. Table 4 below indicates that the vast majority had been reasonably successful on both of these counts.

Degree of Success	Beginning Teachers' Perception of success with	
	Classroom Management	Effective Discipline
Very successful	21 (13%)	24 (15%)
Successful	97 (61%)	94 (59%)
Adequate	40 (25%)	41 (25%)
Unsuccessful	2 (1%)	1 (1%)
Very unsuccessful	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Totals	160 (100%)	160 (100%)

Table 5: Graduates' Perceptions of Their Degree of Success with Classroom Management and Effective Discipline

Students' General Comments

In some open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire, graduates had an opportunity express their views about the most satisfying and most frustrating aspects of teaching. There are obvious problems in making sweeping generalisations from the data. Only where several graduates mentioned a particular matter is mention made of it below.

Early childhood graduates found working with children to be most satisfying, and mentioned associated feelings of enjoyment and satisfaction. In terms of frustration, management-related issues were commonly mentioned together with a lack of time to get things done. Primary graduates likewise indicated that working with children was the most satisfying aspect of their work. A wide array of factors were mentioned as being most frustrating, the more common of which were being casual and not having your own class, managing time, programming, and coping with children with special needs and behaviour problems.

Graduates were also invited to give advice to their employing authorities and to their former lecturers about meeting the needs of beginning teachers.

Early childhood graduates wanted their employers to give them more support and to let them experiment, try new ideas and practical strategies. Primary graduates likewise wanted support, especially with programming. They wanted time to demonstrate their capabilities and an easier workload in their first year. They also wanted good models to follow.

In terms of advice to lecturers, early childhood graduates advocated keeping in touch with the world of practice so that lecturers were practical and knew what works. Keeping up to date with research and new strategies was also important. Primary graduates suggested that lecturers get back into schools. Well over half of all the responses indicated a need to be familiar with practical matters such as programming and classroom management.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To a large extent the findings from the study corroborate many of the conclusions that other researchers have reached from studies of induction and beginning teaching. It is not surprising, for example, that practice teaching is highly valued by students, and that there is room to improve induction programs.

The major significance of the study at this point is to guide the development of programs at the University of Western Sydney. It will provide a benchmark for studying the impact of the new courses which place emphasis on reflective practice, a greater integration of knowledge, and an in-school semester.

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